

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5203

INFO PANCANAL IMMEDIATE

USCINCSO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PN

SUBJECT: EMBASSY STONED BY PANAMANIAN STUDENTS

SUMMARY: PROTESTING AGAINST THE PRESENCE OF U.S. BASES IN THE CANAL ZONE, THE SECRETARY'S COMMENTS AT THE SOUTHERN GOVERNORS' CONFERENCE LAST WEEK, AND THE COMPLICITY OF GEN. TORRIJOS AND THE GOP WITH AMERICAN "IMPERIALISM", APPROXIMATELY 600-800 PANAMANIAN STUDENTS RIOTED AND STONED THE U.S. EMBASSY THIS MORNING. STONING CONTINUED FOR THIRTY MINUTES. NO EMBASSY PERSONNEL WERE INJURED, BUT OVER 100 WINDOWS IN CHANCERY WERE BROKEN AND FIVE VEHICLES BELONGING TO EMBASSY OR EMBASSY EMPLOYEES WERE DAMAGED. NATIONAL GUARD (GN) RESPONSE WAS SLOW AND INADEQUATE TO SITUATION. EMBASSY IS SENDING STRONG NOTE OF PROTEST TO FOREIGN MINISTRY OVER INCIDENT AND GN HANDLING OF IT. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY WAS INFORMED LATE YESTERDAY THAT VARIOUS GROUPS OF
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PANAMANIAN STUDENTS PLANNED TO DEMONSTRATE TODAY AT THE CHANCERY

TO PROTEST U.S. BASES IN THE CANAL ZONE, SECRETARY KISSINGER'S USE OF 'UNILATERAL' IN REFERENCE TO U.S. DEFENSE RIGHTS UNDER A NEW CANAL TREATY AT THE SOUTHERN GOVERNORS CONFERENCE LAST WEEK, AND AGAINST CONCEPT OF 'JOINT DEFENSE' OF CANAL BY U.S. AND NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS ENVISIONED IN STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES SIGNED IN FEBRUARY, 1974.

2. NUMBER AND COMPOSITION OF STUDENTS. SHORTLY BEFORE 10:00 THIS MORNING APPROXIMATELY 600-800 STUDENTS ARRIVED AT EMBASSY. WE ESTIMATE THAT AT LEAST 90 PERCENT OF STUDENTS WERE FROM SECONDARY SCHOOLS, MOST PROMINENTLY AMONG WHOM, AS WAS TO BE EXPECTED, WERE STUDENTS FROM THE INSTITUTO NACIONAL. LARGE NUMBER OF BANNERS AND PLACARDS FROM THE FER (FRENTE ESTUDANTIL REVOLUCIONARIO) WHOSE MAJOR BASE OF SUPPORT IS IN THE INSTITUTO NACIONAL CONFIRM THEIR PRESENCE. THERE WERE LESS THAN ONE HUNDRED STUDENTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF PANAMA, ALTHOUGH THEY PLAYED AN IMPORTANT PART IN ORGANIZING THE PROTEST AND RIOT. BOTH FSR (FRACCION SOCIALISTA REVOLUCIONARIA, LEFT-WING GROUP BASED PRIMARILY IN UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL), AND GUAYKUCHO GROUPS WERE PRESENT. (GUAYKUCHO ALSO DERIVES SUPPORT FROM UNIVERSITY AND IN PARTICULAR LAW SCHOOL STUDENTS). THERE WAS NO INDICATION OF ANY FEP (FEDERACION ESTUDANTIL PANAMENA) INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEMONSTRATION.

3. PROTEST THEMES. PLACARDS AND BANNERS CARRIED BY STUDENTS CONCENTRATED ON THE "ANTI-BASES" THEME. REPRESENTATIVE SIGNS READ: "BASES NO", "NI UN SOLO SOLDADO", "YANQUI BASES NO", "NO DEFENSA CONJUNTA, NO DEFENSA UNILATERAL", AND "EL PUEBLO ARMADO NO SERA APLASTADO". OTHER SIGNS COVERED THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST AND ANTI-CAPITALIST FRONT. GENERAL TORRIJOS AND THE GOP WERE PROMINENT TARGETS OF VERBAL ABUSE. GOVERNMENT WAS DENOUNCED FOR ITS COMPLICITY WITH THE U.S. ON THE DEFENSE ISSUE, AND FOR NOT TELLING THE WHOLE TRUTH IN ITS REVELATIONS OF TREATY NEGOTIATING POSITIONS AND PROGRESS. TORRIJOS' REVOLUTION WAS AGAIN DERIDED AS A "CARICATURE OF A REVOLUTION". SECRETARY KISSINGER'S COMMENTS ON THE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS WERE BLASTED.

4. VIOLENCE ORGANIZED. AFTER A STUDENT RINGLEADER'S STRIDENT DENUNCIATION OF THE ABOVE THEMES (DELIVERED THROUGH BULLHORN), LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ROCKS BEGAN TO BE THROWN. THERE CAN BE NO REPEAT NO DOUBT THAT THE ROCK-THROWING WAS PLANNED AND ORGANIZED AHEAD OF TIME. IN FACT, EMBASSY INFORMATION OF YESTERDAY SPECIFIED THAT VIOLENCE WOULD BE IN THE OFFING. STONING CONTINUED FOR APPROXIMATELY THIRTY (30) MINUTES AND WAS HEAVY. SOME PAINT BOMBS WERE HURLED AGAINST THE BUILDING'S FACADE. IN ADDITION, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, TWO (2) MOLOTOV COCKTAILS WERE THROWN, ONE EXPLODED, THEY WERE FOUND ON EMBASSY GROUNDS AFTER THE RIOT BROKE UP.

5. DAMAGE REPORT. INITIAL ESTIMATES SHOW VIRTUALLY ALL FRONT AND SIDE OF BUILDING WINDOWS SHATTERED FROM GROUND TO TOP FLOORS (278 PANES) (EMBASSY ADMIN COUNSELOR ESTIMATES DAMAGE WORSE THIS TIME THAN OF LAST AUGUST), FIVE VEHICLES BELONGING TO EMBASSY OR EMBASSY EMPLOYEES IN PARKING LOT AND ON STREET OUTSIDE OF GROUNDS WERE DAMAGED. ROCKS AND PAINT ALSO DAMAGED SOME OFFICE EQUIPMENT INSIDE THE BUILDING.

6. NATIONAL GUARD RESPONSE. NATIONAL GUARD (GN) GROOPS STATIONED AROUND CHANCERY THIS MORNING WERE ARMED AT OUTSET OF VIOLENCE ONLY WITH RIOT BATONS AND WERE NOT IN FULL COMBAT DRESS. FOR AT LEAST TWENTY TO TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES OF THE STONING THEY DID NOT MAKE ANY MOVES TO CONTROL THE ROCK THROWING. EMBOFF NOTED THAT STUDENTS HURLED STONES OVER THE WALL OF THE EMBASSY PARKING LOT DIRECTLY ONTO THE VEHICLES PARKED IN IT WHILE GUARDSMEN LOOKED ON. ONLY AFTER THE PERIOD OF TIME MENTIONED ABOVE DID THE GUARDSMEN DON GAS MASKS AND TAKE UP CARBINES. AS SOON AS THEY DID, THEY BEGIN TO MOVE THE STUDENTS FROM THE FRONT OF THE CHANCERY TO ONE SIDE USING TROOPS, MOTORCYCLE POLICE, AND GN TRUCKS. STUDENTS THREW ROCKS AT GN, BUT WERE FORCED FROM FRONT TO REAR OF CHANCERY. TEN TO TWELVE TEAR GAS CANISTERS WERE FIRED AND STUDENTS DISPERSED . OUR INFORMATION INDICATED THAT FIVE SQUADS OF GUARDIA WERE STATIONED AROUND THE GROUNDS, BUT THEY WERE INSUFFICIENTLY ARMED, OR DIRECTED, OR BOTH TO STEM THE VIOLENCE. REPORTEDLY, STUDENTS ALSO STONED FOREIGN MINISTRY AFTER LEAVING EMBASSY. WE HAVE RECEIVED REPORTS FROM UNIVERSITY THAT STUDENTS ARE INCENSED OVER GN USE OF GAS AND ARE PLANNING RETALIATION AGAINST GN. OTHER REPORTS INDICATE THEY ARE TALKING OF A REPEAT PERFORMANCE AT EMBASSY TOMORROW.

7. EMBASSY IS SENDING STRONG PROTEST NOTE TO MINISTRY OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FOREIGN RELATIONS TO PROTEST INADEQUACY OF GUARDIA PROTECTION.

8. COMMENT. VIOLENCE OF THIS DEMONSTRATION APPEARS TO BE THE WORST HERE IN RECENT YEARS. AND IT COMES AT A PARTICULARLY INOPPORTUNE TIME FO U.S., AS WELL AS, IF NOT MORE SO, FOR THE GOP. IT SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED THAT THE PROTEST WAS NEARLY AS CRITICAL OF TORRIJOS AND THE GOP AS IT WAS OF THE UNITED STATES' PRESENCE AND POLICIES. FIRST REACTIONS FROM THE GOP INDICATE THEIR FRUSTRATION AND DISMAY AT THE VIOLENCE. PRESIDENT LAKAS HAS ALREADY TELEPHONED THE AMBASSADOR TO APOLOGIZE. THE ONE THING THAT IS CRYSTAL CLEAR IS THAT THE GOP IS FINDING IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO BUY OFF, PLACATE OR OTHERWISE CONTROL ITS STUDENT CRITICS.

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